

# Plant Disease and Insect Advisory



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## Wheat Disease Update – 29 July 2003 Bob Hunger, Extension Wheat Pathologist

**Karnal bunt (KB) update.** Processing/testing of wheat (grain) samples collected from Oklahoma as part of the national KB testing program was completed last week (25 July 2003). All grain samples (72 samples from 15 counties) collected in Oklahoma during 2003 tested negative for the presence of teliospores of the KB fungus (*Tilletia indica*). Results of this survey have been posted in the national database, and will be used by USDA-APHIS to facilitate procurement and issuance of the phytosanitary certificate indicating that wheat produced in Oklahoma in 2003 was produced in an area not known to be infested with KB. This certificate is needed for Oklahoma wheat to move freely into the international market.



## Digger Wasps are Active

Tom A. Royer, Extension Entomologist



I have received reports of legions of digger wasps “harassing” some people while they are attempting to garden or mow their lawn. The callers’ description of the wasp (about 1½ inches, black with yellow bands on the abdomen, brownish wings) suggests that they are Cicada Killers. These wasps are solitary. The female wasp digs a ½ inch diameter burrow in the ground, which she provisions with a cicada or katydid that she has stung and paralyzed, and lays an egg on it. She will then cover the burrow and start a new one. The eggs soon hatch,

producing a legless larva that consumes the paralyzed, but living cicada that its mother so thoughtfully provided. The grub overwinters inside a silken cocoon, then pupates in the spring and emerges as an adult wasp the following summer. Female cicada killers rarely sting, unless stepped on with bare feet or crushed.

The male wasp CANNOT STING, but is often the one that does all the “harassing.” It establishes a territory that it defends from other male wasps, and waits for a female to fly by that it will attempt to mate with. When a person enters the wasp’s territory, the male will fly back

and forth, sort of “checking out” the new intruder. They usually leave once they determine that the person is neither a competing male nor a desirable female wasp. The problem is that as the person keeps moving, another male’s territory is invaded, and the harassment starts all over again.

These wasps prefer to lay eggs in bare, sandy soils. Mulching or planting of ground covers can reduce the problem. It is important to remember that the males cannot sting, and the female wasps rarely sting. A homeowner may be able to “live with them” if those facts are understood. As a last resort, the nest area can be treated with a labeled insecticide such as Sevin 50WP or another labeled product such as Bayer Advanced Home™ or Ortho’s Home Defense. It is probably best to treat after sunset, when the wasps become less active. Usually, once the nests and females are killed, the males will leave the area.

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Dr. Richard Grantham  
Director, Plant Disease and Insect Diagnostic Laboratory

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